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CONTACT:
Scott W. Harman
Public Relations Specialist
717-272-6621, ext: 6079
Scott.Harman@va.gov

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Dauphin County Veterans Court Holds Press Conference

A press conference announcing the formation of a Dauphin County Veterans Court will be held at 11 a.m. on Thursday, October 27, 2011.

Judge Bruce Bratton will explain the guidelines of the Veterans Court being established in Dauphin County. The Veterans Court is designed to assist Veterans who are accused of crimes that occurred as they tried to readjust to "civilian lives". The Veterans Court is supported by the Lebanon VA Medical Center and like the existing Drug Court and Mental Health Court, will require qualified defendants to complete a series of rehabilitation processes aimed to help Veterans with underlying substance abuse, medical and behavioral conditions. Through this program, Veterans charged with misdemeanor or non-violent felony offenses can get a second chance.

Lebanon VA Medical Center (VAMC) operates a variety of programs for eligible Veterans facing legal issues. "When local Veterans find themselves facing charges, VA rehabilitation specialists are available to work with the court system and establish an alternative treatment program to give Veterans a second chance", stated Robert W. Callahan, Jr, Director and CEO at the Lebanon VA Medical Center. Many Veterans, including those returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, who are charged with misdemeanor or felony offenses often need rehabilitative services and this is one more way VA can help them. The program includes behavior health treatment and other vocational and supportive housing services to Veterans if their medical condition contributed to their legal infraction. "Our focus is to make Veterans better medically and behaviorally so they can become more productive members of society rather than a burden to state or county prison systems," Callahan said.

Lebanon VAMC's Veterans Justice Outreach Specialist, Julie Bergstresser, will attend the press conference to learn more about the formation of the Veterans Court in Dauphin County. "Diagnoses of combat-related brain disorders such as traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder are on the list of eligible criteria for rehabilitative services through the Veterans Court program. Each county has the authority to set guidelines beyond those statutes that will deem a Veteran eligible or not, based on the offense. Most counties share the guideline that Veterans must have served on active duty, received an honorable discharge and be charged with a probation-eligible crime", stated Ms. Bergstresser.

With the 9 county areas supported by the Lebanon VA, there have been 330 referrals with 60 Veterans currently participating in the program. The referrals include Veterans from Vietnam, Persian Gulf, Operation Enduring Freedom /Operation Iraqi Freedom and Grenada.

The goal of the Veterans Justice Outreach is to assist as many Veterans as possible to reduce incarceration, recidivism and contribute to society. It's just another way for Lebanon VA Medical Center and the many supporters of Veterans in the community are working hard to help Veterans rehabilitate and improve their health and well-being.

For more information about the Veterans Justice Outreach program, contact Scott W. Harman, Public Affairs Specialist, Lebanon VAMC at 717-228-6079.

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Dauphin County Veterans Court 10/26/11

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